

NPS-140

CHARLES M. ALLMOND, III

BIRTH DATE: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 7, 1983

RUNNING TIME: 10:27

INTERVIEWER: SERENA RINKER

RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND, NY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1995

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: LYDIA HANHARDT, 6/1995

COAST GUARD AT ELLIS ISLAND  
1953-1954

RINKER: I have Mr. Charles Allmond here on August 7, 1983, and he has been on the tour at Ellis, and he had said that he would like to share his experiences when he was in the Coast Guard and when he closed Ellis down in 1954.  
  
( disturbance to the microphone )

ALLMOND: I was serving in the United States Coast Guard on active duty beginning in July 1953 and was stationed on Ellis Island, and was stationed here until approximately April 1954 when the Coast Guard station was deactivated. The Coast Guard facility was a port security unit, which had been organized, I believe, approximately in 1950, after President Truman signed the act creating port security and assigning port

security duties to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard occupied the former administration buildings of the Immigration Service on the easterly side of the island, I think.

RINKER: Island Two.

ALLMOND: Island Two, the three buildings facing the ferry slip, that were occupied, plus an additional building behind, which was used as a recreation hall and laundry. The island, at that time, 1953, was quite well-maintained. The grass was mowed. There were rows of sycamore trees behind the buildings and a large parade ground behind the Coast Guard buildings, which was used for reviews and musters and that type of thing. There were park benches placed along the sea wall so that on off hours you could sit and watch the harbor traffic and get a beautiful view of the New York skyline. All in all, it was quite a nice place.

I think the duties that we performed in the, while I was in the Coast Guard, were, port security duties primarily were boarding foreign vessels that had been behind the iron curtain, keeping these vessels under surveillance while they were in New York, and inspecting and maintaining surveillance watches on the

various port facilities which were handling cargo that was coming in from ships that had been behind the iron curtain. There were approximately fifteen forty-foot patrol boats which were kept in ferry slip and ran regular, ran regular patrols.

RINKER: ( off mike ) Is this ferry clip?

ALLMOND: . . . ran regular patrols.

RINKER: ( off mike unintelligible voices ) It was in this ferry slip.

ALLMOND: Right. In the ferry slip at Ellis Island, yes. And ran regular patrols out of, out of here, all over the Hudson and east rivers and would carry the patrols, the surveillance watches out to the various ships that were under surveillance and the various piers that were under surveillance. And there was also, my recollection is that the third district Coast Guard, brig, or the military prison, was also located here on Ellis Island, and that would have been in the same general area where the Coast Guard buildings were, all the way to the rear of the island. When the, when this facility was closed down in the spring of 1954, the port security unit personnel were transferred to

Pier Nine East River, and nothing more was done here.

And I had occasioned to come back to Ellis Island, oh, a couple of months after it had been closed, and we came back in a forty-foot patrol boat on some particular duty. I don't recall what that was. But, anyway, the place was closed down completely by that time. During the period of time when I was here, the summer and winter of, summer of '53 and the early winter of '54, the part of the island which would be called Island Number 1 was used by the Immigration Service and it was, at that time, used for a detention center for persons awaiting deportation from the United States. The, I never got to see this part of the island while I was in the Coast Guard because we just weren't permitted to cross over into this particular area. The two halves of the island were kept pretty much separate and distinct. The transportation to and from the island at that time was by a ferryboat called The Ellis Island which now, the remains of which now sunk in the slip. This vessel was built in Wilmington, Delaware by the Harlan and Hollingsworth Ship Building Company in 1904. And in 1954, fifty years later, it was as good as the day it was built. It was a wonderful little ferryboat, and

carried nothing but passengers, no vehicles, so that it didn't get very hard use, and it went back and forth to, between Ellis Island and South Ferry several times a day. I believe the last trip between South Ferry and Ellis was around midnight, because if you had a, if you had a liberty and you were a little bit late and you missed that last boat, you had to sleep in the ferry until the next day to come back to Ellis Island. That's about all I can recall right offhand without being asked specific questions. ( disturbance to the microphone ) ( break in tape ) While I was stationed here, being a, being a young fellow of about twenty-two years of age, and not knowing too much about what was going on in the world, I was never quite sure about what happened over on this side of the island, although upon inquiry I was informed that there were deportees here awaiting deportation. And there was a large, (off-mike) thank you, a large fenced-in area, chain-link, high chain-link fence with barbed wire on the top of it, towards the, uh, towards the outboard side of the ferry slip. And occasionally we would see people in the yard inside this fence. And as I had indicated, I'd been informed that they were awaiting deportation. There were any number of

people that would come out here on the ferry and go to the immigration side. There was quite a bit of traffic. But, as I say, I really don't know what those people did. But, obviously, they were employed, because they came and went on a regular basis. So there was some activity here. On the Coast Guard side, there was a rather large room that was used for the galley and mess hall toward the back end of the, what I would call the back end of the island, and then the, most of the barracks where the men slept would have been on the first building as you come in the ferry slip, large, I guess, former wards, ward rooms of the hospital, with a number of bunks in them. We probably had, I'm just guessing now, but I'd say a hundred and fifty to two hundred Coast Guardsmen stationed in this facility. ( disturbance to the microphone ) Petty officers were quartered in little individual rooms. We had about three to six men in a room, and they were, as I recall, small tiled rooms, could have been operating rooms at one time. But the thing that impressed me most about this island was the wonderful architecture. I don't think I've ever seen buildings that are quite the same as these. The architecture is unusual, and the buildings were built

to last forever, and they'd done a pretty good job of surviving, even though the roof had been allowed to deteriorate, and the weather, quite obviously, has done some damage. ( disturbance to microphone ) We used a recreation hall behind the main buildings down a corridor, and this recreation hall was a rather large room. Had a stage in the front of it, and folding chairs, and it was used for movies. And there were some pool tables there, there was a post exchange, a store. And on each side of the stage, as I recall, there was a WPA mural. I can't remember the name of the artist, but I remember the painting on the right as you faced the stage was a Coast Guardsman in, or a Navy sailor, in the old-fashioned dress white uniforms of the '30s. And it was really quite fascinating pair of murals, although I can't for the life of me think of what the other one was. But they were obviously done during the WPA era. ( tape ends )